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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MINSK 000282

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SUBJECT: Milinkevich Campaign Manager Discusses Last-Minute Campaign Plans

Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

REF: Minsk 270

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 15, Sergey Kalyakin, campaign manager for Ten Plus Coalition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, provided Pol/Econ Chief an assessment of the candidate's campaign rallies leading up to the March 19 elections. Kalyakin stressed Milinkevich and the campaign team were very pleased with their meetings with voters, noting that an increasing number of Belarusians are interested in listening to an alternative view of Belarus' future and place in the world. Kalyakin claimed that despite GOB pressure, Milinkevich's March 14 campaign rally in the eastern city of Gomel attracted some 6,000 Belarusians. The next major pre-election rally will be a musical concert on March 18 at Bangalore Park in Minsk. However, Kalyakin stressed the Milinkevich team is not under any illusion that Milinkevich would beat Lukashenko in a fair electoral race. On Election Day, Milinkevich remains committed to holding a peaceful protest rally against a flawed electoral process, and he has agreed to work with opposition candidate Aleksandr Kozulin to ensure maximum turnout. Kalyakin expects the GOB to engage in "large-scale provocations" to disrupt the rally. End Summary.

Campaign Rallies A Success

¶2. (C) Sergey Kalyakin, campaign manager for Ten Plus Coalition candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, told Pol/Econ Chief on March 15 that the Milinkevich team remains extremely satisfied with the results of the campaign rallies in Minsk and the regions. He noted that Milinkevich's rallies in the eastern cities of Gomel and Mozyr on March 14 attracted approximately 6,000 and 1,000 Belarusians, respectively. Kalyakin said Milinkevich and the senior leadership of the campaign team, including Kalyakin, deputy campaign manager Victor Korniyenko, and head of the campaign's national committee (or shadow government) Anotoly Lebedko, independently hold meetings with voters all over the country. According to Kalyakin, the Milinkevich team has met with roughly 10,000 voters in the past three days, and the team is conducting around 10 rallies (small and large) a day.

¶3. (C) The next major pre-election rally will be a musical concert in honor of Milinkevich on March 18 at Bangalore Park in Minsk. The Belarusian Assembly of Democratic NGOs is co-organizing the concert with the Milinkevich team. Minsk city authorities apparently approved the request to hold the concert at Bangalore Park. The concert will

feature musical groups that were banned by the GOB after performing in a similar opposition concert in July 2004.

Dynamics Of The Campaign Rallies, GOB Disruptions

14. (C) Kalyakin noted the vast majority of those who attend the rallies demonstrate considerable interest in the Ten Plus proposals for a better Belarus, responding to the speeches of Milinkevich and his team with enthusiastic applause. Kalyakin believes that the central campaign theme of "freedom, truth, and justice" resonates well with voters, but noted that rally attendees pose a wide range of questions to the Ten Plus team, including questions on education, relations with Russia and the West, and health care. Kalyakin claimed an increasing number of Belarusians are turning out for the campaign rallies because democratic-minded voters are beginning to understand that they - and not the pro-Lukashenko supporters - represent the majority.

15. (C) Kalyakin said that although the pro-Lukashenko Belarusian Republican Youth Union (BRSM) and veterans organizations disrupt the rallies by raising pro-Lukashenko banners and asking provocative questions, their disruptions only underscore for attendees the repressive nature of the regime. Kalyakin expressed frustration the campaign period is soon coming to a close because he is convinced the Milinkevich team would have been able to attract significantly more voters to the democratic camp.

More Coordination With Opposition Candidate Kozulin

16. (C) On March 14, Milinkevich and opposition candidate

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Aleksandr Kozulin agreed to work together up to and immediately following Election Day. Kalyakin explained the two campaign teams will coordinate on election monitoring, development of a joint declaration on Election Day, and organizing protest rallies. Both candidates decided to remain in the race in an effort to maximize the number of votes for the opposition.

17. When asked if Kalyakin now viewed Kozulin as a genuine member of the opposition, the campaign manager asserted Kozulin is indeed an opponent of Lukashenko. However, Kalyakin remains convinced Kozulin is far from being a democrat and would most likely design political system very similar to Lukashenko's current system if Kozulin became president.

Protest Rallies Will Be Against Flawed Electoral Process

18. (C) Kalyakin said the Ten Plus recognizes that Milinkevich would likely not win the elections even in a fair electoral race, but the purpose of the Election Day protest rallies is to call attention to a fundamentally flawed electoral process. The Milinkevich team has concluded that in a fair electoral process, Lukashenko would likely receive 43 - 50 percent of the vote and Milinkevich would receive 28 - 33 percent. However, Kalyakin said his team has received information from "GOB insiders" that Lukashenko has already ordered the Central Election Committee to release the following vote tally: 78 percent for Lukashenko, 8 percent for pro-Lukashenko MP Sergey Gaidukevich, 4 percent for Milinkevich, and 3 percent for Kozulin. Such a gross distortion of the facts would be wrong and intolerable, according to Kalyakin. Moreover, the electoral process leading up to the elections has seriously fallen short of international election standards. Thus, regardless of the published vote tally on March 19, Kalyakin said Milinkevich and Kozulin will appeal to voters to "defend their choice."

Preparations for Election Day Rallies

¶9. (C) Kalyakin said preparations for a massive protest rally on October Square in Minsk beginning at 8pm were on schedule. The Milinkevich team produced and distributed 400,000 leaflets advertising the October Square rally. Other organizations and civic initiatives, such as the human rights NGO Charter 97, the youth group Zubr, and the civic initiatives Khopets ("Enough"), as well as several independent newspapers, have also been advertising the rally (reftel). The team has assigned Milinkevich supporters to stage protests outside of eight polling stations in Minsk.

¶10. (C) Kalyakin was not willing to speculate on the number of people he expects to participate in the Minsk rallies, and he was realistic about the likelihood of an overwhelming number of supporters showing up at October Square, but he is convinced a surprising number of people will participate. Kalyakin added that if the GOB tries to prevent the opposition from gathering on October Square (which is the most likely scenario), the Milinkevich team has already worked out alternative protest scenarios. He did not go into detail on the alternative plans.

¶11. (C) The Milinkevich team has developed a decentralized system of protests for the regions - each regional headquarters will be responsible for staging protests in the squares and outside of several polling stations. This way, Milinkevich supporters will be able to focus on their respective neighborhoods and not on trying (perhaps in vain) to travel to Minsk to participate in the Minsk rallies.

Milinkevich Team Expects GOB Provocations

¶12. (C) The Milinkevich team fully expects the Belarusian security forces to engage in "large-scale provocations" during the October Square rally on Election Day. Kalyakin recalled that in 1996 the regime brought out anti-riot equipment such as water cannons to control protests involving tens of thousands of Belarusians. The campaign manager stressed the Ten Plus Coalition has been underscoring the need for supporters to protest peacefully and to avoid clashes with security forces, but Kalyakin warned that Lukashenko was ready and willing to employ

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violent measures to disperse a large protest rally.

"Let's Not Forget The Orange Revolution!"

¶13. (C) Kalyakin concluded his discussion of Election Day events by noting that although the Milinkevich team is playing on a seriously uneven playing field, they are still "playing to win." Kalyakin stressed that even five days prior to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine nobody could have predicted the events would have unfolded the way they did. The campaign manager argued the international community should view Belarus in similar terms.

Comment

¶14. (C) Sergey Kalyakin was considerably more upbeat than we have seen him in a long time. Although he is a realist and fully appreciates Lukashenko's resolve to preserve the status quo, it is clear the frequent meetings with voters have energized the campaign team. Kalyakin is probably right when he said that if the Milinkevich team had more time to engage voters and faced less harassment by the GOB, the opposition could have persuaded more voters to support

an alternative candidate.

Krol